

January 14, 2015

Instructional Quality Commission
California State Board of Education
1430 N Street, Suite #5111
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Members,

I write to you in my capacity as Education Director for the Sikh Coalition, a national Sikh civil rights organization. We understand that the Instructional Quality Commission is currently reviewing the draft of the History-Social Science Framework. The Sikh Coalition, the largest Sikh organization in the United States, seeks to educate others about Sikhism (the world's fifth largest religion) in order to dispel ignorance and discrimination against Sikhs.

We understand the vital role that the Commission and the Board of Education plays in stimulating intellectual development and curiosity in students across the state. Since you play such an influential role in the type of education that our students receive, we want to partner with you to ensure that the History-Social Science (HSS) Framework's coverage of Sikhs and the Sikh religion contains accurate and relevant information.

It has come to our attention that during the last public comment period, the Hindu American Foundation (HAF) as well as California Parents for the Equalization of Educational Materials (CAPEEM) requested that the Commission significantly alter or delete almost every Sikh reference currently in the draft HSS Framework. In response, the Sikh Coalition has provided fact-based evidence for why these public comments are false and unfounded. We have included this information in the form of a chart, titled, "SC Response to Public Comments".

In addition, the Sikh Coalition reached out to specific Sikh scholars to opine on this matter as they have extensive expertise in the subject matter. Many of these scholars are the current/past Chair of the Sikh Studies departments in their respective universities. Several of these scholars wrote letters to the Commission, which we have also included.

Finally, the Sikh Coalition previously wrote to the Commission in November of last year regarding the removal of the Cheema v. Thompson case. Currently, the case is included in Grade 12: Principles of American Democracy, Interpreting the Constitution: The Work of the U.S. Supreme Court (line 2489). For your review, we have also included this letter.

History-Social Science Draft Framework Excerpt	Public Comment	Sikh Coalition Response
<p>“The history of California then becomes the story of successive waves of immigrants from the sixteenth century through modern times and the enduring marks each left on the character of the state. These immigrants include (1) the Spanish explorers, Indians from northern Mexico, Russians, and the Spanish-Mexican settlers of the Mission and Rancho period, known as “Californios,” who introduced European plants, agriculture, and a herding economy to the region; (2) the people from around the world who settled here, established California as a state, and developed its mining, industrial, and agricultural economy; (3) the Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Filipino, Sikhs, and other immigrants of the second half of the nineteenth century, who provided a new supply of labor for California’s railroads, agriculture, and industry and contributed as entrepreneurs and innovators, especially in agriculture; (4) the immigrants of the first half of the twentieth century, including new arrivals from Latin America and Europe; and (5) the many immigrants arriving today from Latin America, the nations of the Pacific Basin.”</p>	<p>Suggested Replacement Text: “(3) the Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Filipino, SikhsSouth Asians (from current day India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan)...”</p> <p>HAF Comment: While the majority of immigrants from India or South Asia were Sikh, many were Hindu and Muslim. Given that the remaining groups are referred to by ethnicity or nationality, it would be more appropriate to say South Asians (from current-day India and Pakistan).</p>	<p>The Sikh Coalition recommends keeping the language of the draft, and leaving the word “Sikhs” instead of changing it to “South Asians” to describe the immigrant group. The majority of California immigrants from South Asia were Sikhs, and moreover, it was Sikhs who were most notable for their work building railroads, becoming successful farmers, and made significant achievements in America as a distinct immigrant community. In fact, in response to the success of Sikh farmers, the Alien Land Act, which prohibited non-citizens (mostly Sikhs, known then as “Asian Indians”) from owning land, was passed in California in 1913. Similarly, the U.S. Immigration Act of 1917 specifically banned immigration of South Asian laborers (again almost all Sikh). Therefore, it would be incorrect to label those immigrants as South Asian instead of Sikh.</p>
<p>“They learn about the contributions of immigrants to California and United States history, such as Dalip Singh Saund, a Sikh</p>	<p>Suggested Replacement Text: “They learn about the contributions of immigrants to California and United States</p>	<p>The Sikh Coalition recommends that Dalip Singh Saund be labeled as a Sikh immigrant, and the first Asian American to serve in</p>

immigrant who was the first Asian American to serve in the United States Congress."	history, such as Dalip Singh Saund, a Sikh Indian immigrant who was the first Asian American to serve in the United States Congress." HAF Comment: In most historical accounts, Dalip Singh Saund is referred to and self-identifies as an immigrant of Indian origin. Many of his own writings demonstrate this fact, including My Mother India, a book written by Saund in 1930.	Congress. When Sikhs first arrived in the United States, India did not exist as a nation. It was invented by the British in 1947. Therefore, to include all Sikhs as Indian, even the ones that never set foot on the so-called Indian soil, would be historically inaccurate.
"Conversion slowed in India with the emergence of Sikhism in 1469."	HAF Comment: Not sure how conversion slowed with the emergence of Sikhism. Forcible conversions and the jizya were still common in the Mughal era.	Sikhism was not a trivial phenomenon. The Sikhs directly confronted intolerant practices such as forcible conversion, and the Sikh community played an important role in the demise of the Mughal empire, which in the Panjab was replaced by the Sikh empire. We are not sure why HAF would like to erase every single mention of Sikhs from California's textbooks and curricula. The right-wing Hindu groups in India have also been trying to minimize the impact of minority religions in India since the BJP first came to power in 1999.
"Religious enthusiasm and challenge to orthodoxy in the early modern period was not unique to Europe. In South Asia Sikhism arose as a new religion founded by Guru Nanak, a social reformer who challenged the authority of the Brahmin and the power of the Mughal empire. Students may learn about the Sikh Scripture (Guru Granth Sahib), articles of faith, turban, and Sikh history. The three basic	Suggested Replacement Text: "Religious enthusiasm and challenge to orthodoxy in the early modern period was not unique to Europe. In South Asia, the Bhakti movement within Hinduism, which placed emphasis on a personal expression of devotion to God, grew more popular, thanks to the saints such as Meera Bai (devotee of Krishna) and Ramananda (devotee of Ram). "	Based on contemporary scholarship by scholars like Krishna Sharma and Karen Prentiss, the so-called "bhakti movement" is "an artificial construct." According to Sharma's <i>Bhakti and the Bhakti Movement: A New Perspective</i> (2002) and Prentiss' <i>The Embodiment of Bhakti</i> (2000), the notion of a "bhakti movement" was invented by colonial scholars such as Grierson and Monier

principles of Sikhism are honest living, sharing with the needy, and praying to the same and one God."	<p>Sikhism arose as a new religion based on the teachings of Guru Nanak, a social reformer founded by Guru Nanak, a social reformer who challenged the authority of the Brahmin and the power of the Mughal empire."</p> <p>HAF Comment: Greater context about the time period and rise in popularity of "Bhakti" (medieval movement within Hinduism that placed emphasis on a personal expression of devotion to God) saints across India, many of whom were considered contemporaries of Guru Nanak, would be helpful for students to understand here. This sentence is framed that Sikhism grew out of opposition to Hinduism and Islam.</p>	<p>Williams. HAF is not aware of the scholarly work and is trying to place an independent religion like Sikhism in the ambit of the so-called bhakti movement. Sikhism is based on the absolute rejection of Brahminical doctrine, which is fundamental to the existence of Hindu traditions.</p> <p>Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, not only critiqued Brahminism but also created institutions like langar that undercut the Hindu caste system. He taught that all human beings are equal and can realize the divine within them without any human intermediaries or priestly class like the Brahmins. This is a core tenet of the Sikh faith. Sikhs believe that each individual can realize the divine on his or her own through devotion to God, truthful living, and service to humanity.</p> <p>Therefore, the Coalition recommends leaving the original language – "In South Asia Sikhism arose as a new religion founded by Guru Nanak, a social reformer who challenged the authority of the Brahmin and the power of the Mughal empire." – as that is an accurate depiction of how the Sikh faith emerged, and provides a reason why Sikhs are against the caste system and tyranny.</p>
<p>"The Gold Rush in California and agricultural labor in Hawaii spurred Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Filipino, Hindu, and Sikh immigration to the United States."</p>	<p>Suggested Replacement Text: "The Gold Rush in California and agricultural labor in Hawaii spurred Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Filipino, Hindu, and Sikh South</p>	<p>The Sikh Coalition recommends keeping the language of the draft, and leaving the word "Sikh" instead of changing it to "South Asian" to describe the immigrant group. The</p>

	<p>Asian (from current day India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan) immigration to the United States.”</p> <p>HAF Comment: Why refer to two religious communities, when the remaining references are to ethnicities/nationalities?</p>	<p>majority of California immigrants from South Asia were Sikhs, and moreover, it was Sikhs who were most notable for their success as farmers, and made significant achievements in America as a distinct immigrant community. In fact, in response to the success of Sikh farmers, the Alien Land Act, which prohibited non-citizens (mostly Sikhs, known then as “Asian Indians”) from owning land, was passed in California in 1913. Similarly, the U.S. Immigration Act of 1917 specifically banned immigration of South Asian laborers (again almost all Sikh). Therefore, it would be incorrect to label those immigrants as South Asian instead of Sikh.</p>
<p>“Hinduism – belief in monism, the oneness of all gods and all living things in the Divine One, Brahman; in pure and unchanging spirit behind the impermanence of the material world; in the peace found only in union with the eternal spirit of Brahman; and in reincarnation, karma, dharma, and Hindu ethics.”</p> <p>The Sikhism section is: “Sikhism – Articles of faith, wearing of the turban, Guru Nanak Dev, strict monotheism, brotherhood and equality of humanity, rejection of idol worship and the caste system, the Sri Guru Granth, and the Dasam Granth.”</p>	<p>Suggested Replacement Text: “Hinduism – belief in monism, the oneness of all gods and all living things in the Divine One, Brahman; in pure and unchanging spirit behind the impermanence of the material world; in the peace found only in union with the eternal spirit of Brahman; and or the existence of one Divine Reality (Brahman) that is the unifying principle of its diverse manifestations, including gods and creation. Understandings of Brahman and its relation to creation range from non-dualistic to dualistic and pantheism to panentheism; in the pure an unchanging spirit behind the cyclical impermanence of the material world; in moksh or the peace found in union with the eternal spirit of Brahman, in reincarnation, karma, dharma, and Hindu ethics”</p>	<p>Sikhism heavily reinterprets all concepts and rejects belief in Brahman as a neutral principle, as seen in Shankara’s Advaita. The concept of God in Sikhism is closer to Islam than Hinduism. The Dasam Granth, however, is not central to Sikh practice. We therefore suggest the following: “Sikhism – Articles of faith, wearing of the turban, Guru Nanak, strict monotheism, brotherhood and equality of humanity, rejection of idol worship and the caste system, the Guru Granth Sahib and other Sikh texts.”</p>

	<p>HAF Comment:</p> <p>Similar to how inter-relationships between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are mentioned, Buddhism and Sikhism should cover certain shared concepts such as karma and dharma with explanations of the major differences.</p>	
<p>“Sikhism – Articles of faith, wearing of the turban, Guru Nanak Dev, strict monotheism, brotherhood and equality of humanity, rejection of idol worship and the caste system, the Sri Guru Granth, and the Dasam Granth.”</p>	<p>Suggested Replacement Text:</p> <p>Sikhism – Guru Nanak Dev, the Sri Guru Granth, and the Dasam Granth, monotheism, brotherhood and equality of humanity</p> <p>CAPEEM Comment:</p> <p>This is factually incorrect, and not only a veiled attack on Hinduism which is caricatured as a religion of idol worship and caste system, but also insulting to Sikhism since it is now reduced to a social reform system from an uplifting spiritual system. Starting with their external appearance instead of their beliefs is also insulting to Sikhs. The reference to so-called “idol worship” needs to be deleted. Hindus worship idols as much as Christians worship the cross. Caste is a social structure which exists among Hindus as well as Sikhs and was not a religious idea and hence needs to be deleted from any discussion of religion.</p>	<p>The Sikh Coalition does not agree with any of the comments issued by CAPEEM because they are not correct. Since Sikhism grew out of an opposition to the caste system and idol worship, it is extremely relevant to include this information in the description of the faith. Also intrinsic to the faith is the external identity that Sikhs carry – namely keeping unshorn hair, and wearing a turban. The Sikh Coalition recommends leaving the original language as is, but removing the Dasam Granth. The primary scripture for Sikhs is the Guru Granth Sahib. Therefore, the section on Sikhism should read as follows:</p> <p>“Sikhism – Articles of faith, wearing of the turban, Guru Nanak, strict monotheism, brotherhood and equality of humanity, rejection of idol worship and the caste system, the Guru Granth Sahib and other Sikh texts.”</p>

We hope to be able to work with you to ensure that, going forward, the final HSS Framework has a historically accurate and balanced portrayal of the Sikh faith and the Sikh immigrant community in California. Please feel free to contact me to discuss this further. My phone number is (817) 239-2971, and my email address is manbeena@sikhcoalition.org.

Thank you,

Manbeena Kaur
Education Director
Sikh Coalition

Attachments:

1. Sikh Coalition Response to Public Comments Issued by HAF and CAPEEM re: Sikhs
2. Sikh Coalition Letter to CDE re: Cheema Case
3. Scholar Letter – Balbinder Bhogal
4. Scholar Letter – Nirvikar Singh
5. Scholar Letter – Pashaura Singh
6. Scholar Letter – Arvind-Pal S. Mandair